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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000666

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SUBJECT: MALIANS AND TUAREG REBELS PREPARE FOR DIRECT TALKS

REF: A. BAMAKO 00624

[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00599

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) On July 16 Ahmada ag Bibi, the spokesman of the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC), told the Embassy that Tuareg rebel leaders expected to meet with a delegation of Malian officials in Algiers as early as Friday, July 18. Ag Bibi relayed this information to a Tuareg member of the Embassy's political section by telephone from Algiers.

Ag Bibi and other members of the Tuareg rebel delegation (see Ref. A) left Tamanrasset for Algiers on July 14. The Tuaregs expect to discuss the issue of joint Malian-Algerian-Tuareg military patrols along the Malian-Algerian frontier. The fate of more than 80 Malian soldiers still held by Ibrahim Bahanga and the ADC is also expected to be on the agenda.

2.(C) Minister of Territorial Administration, General Kafougouna Kone, is leading the Malian delegation. Other members include the president of the Algiers Accords' steering committee, Police Controller General Mahamadou Diagouraga; the Malian Ambassador to Algeria, Mamadou Magassouba; the Malian military attache in Algiers, Col. Cheick Fanta Mady Maiga; and the Malian consul to Tamanrasset, Police Controller General Namakoro Diarra, among others. Also in the Malian delegation is Rhissa ag Sidi Mohamed - a Tuareg belonging to the Chamanamas tribe who was the Secretary General of the Front for the Liberation of the Azawad (FPLA) during Mali's 1991-1996 rebellion. Ag Sidi Mohamed was part of the pre-negotiating team Minister Kone led to Algiers at the end of June. His presence within the Malian government delegation has confused Tuareg rebel leaders who view his inclusion as an attempt by the Malians to subvert Tuareg unity. Ag Sidi Mohamed appears to be a peripheral figure with little to no influence over Tuareg rebels or members of the Kidal Tuareg community.

3.(SBU) Minister Kone left Bamako following a highly publicized meeting between the GOM and a delegation of senior Algerian military officers. The Algerian military delegation was led by General Amrani Anmar and apparently included two other Generals, four colonels and several lesser ranking officers. The delegation met with President Amadou Toumani Toure, Malian military leadership and the Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs. According to Malian press reports, the Algerian delegation discussed the possibility of instituting joint Malian-Algerian-Tuareg military patrols to counter banditry, drug trafficking and terrorism along the Mali-Algeria frontier. The Algerians and Malians also discussed agreements allowing for cross-border pursuit, greater information and intel sharing, and additional material support for the Malian military.

4.(SBU) On July 15 Minister Kone told the Malian government newspaper, l'Essor, that upcoming talks with Tuareg rebels in Algiers would be confined to the framework of the Algiers Accords. "The goal of our trip is not to sign a new agreement," said Kone. "The meetings in Algiers will be based wholly on the agreement we have already signed." Kone said Mali's pre-conditions for negotiations with Tuareg rebels were the liberation of Malian soldiers held by Bahanga and the ADC, the return of arms and ammunition captured during recent rebel attacks, and the dismantling of rebel "bases." These bases are presumably in Tegharghar and Tin Assalek. Minister Kone also told the l'Essor that he traveled to Algiers at the end of June to meet with Algerian officials "because people often say that our government has done nothing" regarding the implementation of the Algiers Accords and that Malian government recognized a need to better frame publicly what the Accords actually require and the facts regarding Mali's progress toward meeting these commitments.

5.(C) Comment: It appears, at least from Bamako, that Algeria has done its due diligence and that puzzle pieces paving the way for a renewed commitment to the Algiers Accords are falling into place. Minister Kone's reference to a Malian attempt to correct the public record regarding Mali's dedication to the Algiers Accords is also encouraging, particularly since we have encouraged the GOM to ratchet up its public relations strategy by highlighting the true status of Algiers Accords commitments, and Malian steps toward their fulfillment, on several occasions - most recently during Ambassador McCulley's June 20 farewell call on Minister Kone

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just days before the last round of Mali-Algeria discussions (Ref. B). Details on the possibility of joint Malian-Algerian-Tuareg military patrols remain scarce and these patrols likely remain far off, even though ag Bibi seems to believe that there could be some agreement on their composition over the next few days. Hopefully the Algerian mediation team, led by the Algerian Ambassador to Mali, will pressure Bahanga and the ADC to release the Malian soldiers they have been holding for several months as this is a key sticking point for the Malians who are understandably loathe to negotiate with rebels who are using captured members of the Malian military as bargaining chips. The complete and unilateral release of the more than eighty soldiers in Tuareg hands would signify a gesture of good-faith on the part of Tuareg rebels, allow Minister Kone to claim concrete progress upon his return to Bamako, and provide a significant amount of breathing room for the GOM by reducing tensions not only between the Malian military and Tuaregs in the Kidal region, but between Mali's military and civilian leadership.

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